Calculating obstruction groups for $E_{\infty}$ ring spectra

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Abstract

We describe a special instance of the Goerss–Hopkins obstruction theory, due to Senger, for calculating the moduli of $E_{\infty}$ ring spectra with given mod-$p$ homology. In particular, for the 2-primary Brown–Peterson spectrum we give a chain complex that calculates the first obstruction groups, locate the first potential genuine obstructions, and discuss how some of the obstruction classes can be interpreted in terms of secondary operations.

1 Introduction

The mod-$p$ homology of an $E_{\infty}$ ring spectrum $R$ comes equipped with operations called the (Araki–Kudo–)Dyer–Lashof operations. At the prime 2, these take the form of additive natural transformations

$$Q^s : H_n(R) \to H_{n+s}(R)$$

that satisfy a Cartan formula, have their own Adem relations, and interact in a concrete way with homology operations via the Nishida relations. These operations give extra structure which can be used to classify existing $E_{\infty}$ rings and exclude certain phenomena. For example, Hu–Kriz–May used relations between these operations in the dual Steenrod algebra to show that the natural splitting $BP \to MU(p)$ cannot be a map of $E_{\infty}$ ring spectra [HKM01].

Unfortunately, these primary operations alone are not enough information to determine whether the Brown–Peterson spectrum $BP$ admits the structure of an $E_{\infty}$ ring, a long-standing problem in the field. However, more is available in $H_*R$: secondary operations that arise from relations between primary operations. For example, the Adem relation $Q^{2n+1}Q^n = 0$ gives rise to a secondary operation that increases degree by $3n + 2$, but it is only defined on $\ker(Q^n)$ and its value is only well-defined mod the image of $Q^{2n+1}$. This extra data provides more information that can enhance our understanding of the objects that we have and the objects that we cannot.

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It is easiest to describe the obstructions we might obtain in a constructive fashion. The Goerss–Hopkins method attempts to construct $BP$ or $BP(n)$ by starting with the sphere $S$ and then iteratively killing off maps from finite complexes $Z$. Let us examine one way that this procedure might fail:

1. We start with the sphere $S$, whose homology is $F_2$, and call it $R_0$.

2. The homology is not yet correct: it is missing $\xi^2_1$, which is connected to the unit by the Steenrod operation $\text{Sq}^2$. We attach an $E_\infty$-cell in a way that produces it. In this case, we can do this by coning off the map $\eta: S^1 \to S$, forming a pushout along a map of free $E_\infty$ ring spectra. Specifically, we take the diagram $CS^1 \leftarrow S^1 \to S$, use the free $E_\infty$ ring spectrum functor $P$ to build a diagram $P(CS^1) \leftarrow P(S^1) \to S$, and form the pushout in $E_\infty$ ring spectra to construct $R_1$.

3. It turns out that we are no longer missing any homology classes, but the homology is still not correct: there are relations that are not yet satisfied. There is a relation involving the Dyer–Lashof operation $Q^\ell$ (this relation turns out to be $Q^\ell(\xi^2_1) = \xi^2_1$ in $H_6(BP)$, and we know that $Q^n(\xi^2_1) = 0$ for $n$ odd, and so on. We, again, can cone off finite complexes in a way that imposes these relations on homology. The element $Q^\ell(\xi^2_1) + \xi^3_1$ does not lift to the homotopy of $R_1$ (the Steenrod operation $P_1$ is nontrivial on it), so we can’t simply cone off a map $S^8 \to R_1$. Instead, we need to map in a finite complex $Z \to R_1$ that hits this class in homology (and hence the Steenrod operations on it). We construct the pushout $P(CZ) \leftarrow P(Z) \to R_1$ to cone this map off (and repeat for the other relations that we must impose) to construct a new ring $R_2$.

4. We have correctly imposed relations that should hold now, but the homology is still not correct: new classes have appeared in homology when we imposed these relations. These come from "relations between relations" and are called secondary Dyer–Lashof operations. For example, there is an Adem relation saying that $Q^{22} Q^6(y) = Q^{17} Q^{11}(y) + Q^{13} Q^{13}(y)$ for elements $y \in H_2$, the Cartan formula implies that $Q^{22}(\xi^2_1) = 0$, and there are relations $Q^{11}(\xi^2_1) = Q^{13}(\xi^2_1) = 0$. These relations between relations glue together into a secondary operation $\theta$ that can be applied to $\xi^2_1$. This new element $\theta(\xi^2_1) \in H_31BP$ needs to be eliminated because $H_31BP$ is supposed to be zero. We map in a finite complex $W \to R_2$ to clamp down on this spurious new class $\theta(\xi^2_1)$ (and the Steenrod operations on it), coning it off to construct a new ring $R_3$.

5. Now we arrive at our potential problem. When we eliminated $\theta(\xi^2_1)$, we were forced to kill off the Steenrod operations on it, such as the action of the Milnor primitive $M_4$: the element $M_4 \theta(\xi^2_1) \in H_0(R_2)$ must map to zero in $H_6(R_3)$. However, it’s possible that $M_4 \theta(\xi^2_1)$ is the unit 1, in which case we have been forced to make $H_6R_3$ into the zero ring.

This particular problem doesn’t really happen. The reason is not particularly interesting: all the relations we used in this argument also take place in $H_6MU$, and we know that $MU$ admits an $E_\infty$ ring structure. This secondary operation we’ve written
down can’t actually satisfy $M_\theta(\xi_2^2) = 1$ or this argument would equally well exclude the existence of the $E_\infty$ ring structure on $MU$ that we already know is there.

In [Law17], we used the calculation of a different secondary operation in the dual Steenrod algebra to show that the $2$-primary Brown–Peterson spectrum $BP$ does not admit the structure of an $E_\infty$ ring. Just as above, this secondary operation exists because of a relation between primary operations. Unfortunately, the relation in question is much more complicated than a simple Adem relation like $Q^2n+1Q^n = 0$.

**Proposition 1.1** ([Law17, 5.4.1]). Suppose that $A$ is an $E_\infty$-algebra over the Eilenberg–Mac Lane spectrum $H\mathbb{F}_2$ and $x \in \pi_2(A)$. Define the following classes:

- $y_5 = Q^3x$
- $y_7 = Q^5x$
- $y_9 = Q^7x$
- $y_{13} = Q^{11}x$
- $y_{15} = Q^6x + x^4$
- $y_{16} = Q^8x + x^2Q^4x$
- $y_{18} = Q^{10}x + (Q^4x)^2$

Then there is a relation

\[
0 = Q^{20}y_{10} + Q^{18}y_{12} + Q^{17}y_{13} + x^4(Q^{12}y_{10}) + y_5^2(Q^4x)^2 + y_7^2Q^5x + y_9^2Q^8Q^4x + (Q^9y_5)(Q^4x)^2 + (Q^{10}y_6)(Q^4x)^2 + y_5^2(Q^{11}Q^7x + Q^{10}Q^8x + x^4Q^6Q^4x)
\]

in $\pi_{30}(A)$.

In particular, if $R$ is an $E_\infty$ ring then $A = H\mathbb{F}_2 \wedge R$ is an $E_\infty$-algebra over $H\mathbb{F}_2$, and for $x \in H_2(R)$ this gives a relation in $H_{30}R$ between Dyer–Lashof operations on $x$.

This relation gives rise to a secondary operation defined on a subset of $H_2(R)$ (those elements $x$ for which the elements $y_k$ described above all vanish) that takes values in a quotient of $H_{31}(R)$. A calculation of this secondary operation found that its value on the generator $\xi_2^2 \in H_2H\mathbb{F}_2$ is unambiguously $\xi_2^3 \mod$ decomposables, which makes it impossible for the map $H_*BP \to H_*H\mathbb{F}_2$ to preserve secondary operations. This method has now been generalized by Senger to show that $BP$ cannot have an $E_\infty$ ring structure at odd primes [Sen17].

While this gives a rough description of the main result of [Law17], and the size of this relation provides some mild amusement value, most people who see this relation are inclined to ask where on earth it came from. There are no obvious indications why we should focus attention on this particular secondary operation. There are certainly many simpler ones—including ones based solely on the Adem relations—that can be applied to elements in $H_*BP$, and we could attempt to obtain simpler obstructions using those. However, the author’s experience has been that most more straightforward attempts either fail to work or are difficult to calculate. Most of the blame for this can be directed at $MU$: the subring $H_*BP$ of the dual Steenrod algebra is the same as the
image of $H, MU$. If our goal is to show that $H, BP$ cannot be closed under secondary operations, then we have to find a secondary operation built out of a relation that holds in $H, BP$ but not in $H, MU$. The first such relation appears in the list above: it is the relation $0 = Q^4(\xi_2^3) + 2^4 Q^4(\xi_2^3)$ that proves Hu–Kriz–May’s nonsplitting result at the prime 2. The nonlinear nature of this relation forces much of the rest of the mess.

The goal of this paper is to describe the obstruction-theoretic method we used, built to find secondary operations that might genuinely produce a problem. Our method is based on an attempt to repair Kriz’s paper [Kri95], which circulated quietly in preprint form but was not published: it assumed an interaction between Steenrod operations and certain operations in topological André–Quillen cohomology that could not be verified. Trying at length to understand the exact interaction between these operations, and how the obstruction theory could be enhanced to one that took this interaction into account, led to the direction we discuss in this paper. It is difficult to emphasize adequately how much debt we owe to Kriz’s work.

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2 Postnikov-based obstructions to commutativity

For context, we will begin by discussing a revisionist version of Kriz’s technique based on Postnikov towers [Kri95, Bas99].

In rough, for a commutative (or $E_{\infty}$) ring spectrum $R$ and an $R$-module $M$, Basterra constructed topological André–Quillen cohomology groups

$$\text{TAQ}^\ast (R, M),$$

by analogy with the André–Quillen cohomology groups of ordinary commutative rings [Qui70]. There is a restriction map

$$\text{TAQ}^\ast (R, M) \to [R, \Sigma^\ast M]$$

from TAQ-cohomology with coefficients in $M$ to ordinary cohomology with coefficients in $M$. Just as a connective spectrum $X$ has a Postnikov tower $\{\cdots \to P_2 X \to P_1 X \to P_0 X\}$ of spectra which is determined by $k$-invariants

$$k_n \in [P_n X, \Sigma^{n+2} H_{\pi_{n+1}} X],$$

Basterra showed that a connective $E_{\infty}$ ring spectrum $R$ has a Postnikov tower $\{\cdots \to P_2 R \to P_1 R \to P_0 R\}$ of $E_{\infty}$ ring spectra which is determined by $\tilde{k}$-invariants

$$\tilde{k}_n \in \text{TAQ}^{n+2} (P_n R, H_{\pi_{n+1}} R)$$
that restrict to the $k$-invariants of the underlying spectrum. Thus, if we have the ability to show that all the $k$-invariants of a homotopy ring spectrum $R$ lift from cohomology to TAQ-cohomology, we can lift $R$ from a spectrum to an $E_\infty$ ring spectrum.

Of course, this method is not particularly useful if we can’t calculate anything about TAQ. Kriz also developed a spectral sequence for calculating TAQ-cohomology, in particular with coefficients in $\mathbb{F}_p$, based on the Miller spectral sequence [Mil78]. Kriz’s spectral sequence can be interpreted as being of the form

$$\text{Der}_A^s(H_* R, \Omega^t \mathbb{F}_p) \Rightarrow \text{TAQ}^{s-t}(R, H\mathbb{F}_p),$$

where the groups $\text{Der}_A^s$ are André–Quillen cohomology groups in a certain category $A$ of simplicial graded-commutative rings equipped with Dyer–Lashof operations. From knowledge of $\text{TAQ}^s(R, H\mathbb{F}_p)$, one can deduce $\text{TAQ}^s(R, H\mathbb{M})$ for a $\pi_0(R)$-module $M$ using Bockstein spectral sequences.

One of the main difficulties with the Postnikov-based technique is essentially the same as the difficulty that occurs when using Serre’s Postnikov-based technique for computing homotopy groups of spheres. To use the Postnikov technique, you use the coaction of the dual Steenrod algebra $A_*$ on $H_* R$ to compute the homotopy groups $\pi_* R$, and then use the Dyer–Lashof operations on $H_* R$ to compute the TAQ-cohomology groups $\text{TAQ}^s(R, \pi_* R)$ where $k$-invariants live. This division into homotopy and homology uses knowledge of the Steenrod coaction and Dyer–Lashof action on the homology groups separately, but it does not track the fact that there are strong and concrete relationships between them.

3 Background: Goerss–Hopkins obstruction theory

In [GH], Goerss and Hopkins developed a very general obstruction theory for the construction of algebras over operads. In this section, we will give a brief discussion of their method.

The Goerss–Hopkins obstruction theory requires two main ingredients.

- We need a multiplicative homology theory $E_*$, represented by a ring spectrum $E$.
- We need a simplicial operad $O_*$.

These are required to satisfy two main constraints: an Adams–Atiyah condition [GH, 1.4.1], and a "homotopically adapted" condition [GH, 1.4.16]. Some of the main consequences are the following.

- The ring $E_*E$ is flat over $E_*$. This ensures that the pair $(E_*, E_*E)$ form a Hopf algebroid and that $E_*X$ naturally takes values in its category of comodules.
- There is a large library of "basic cells" $\{X_\alpha\}$ with $X_\alpha$ finite and $E_*X_\alpha$ projective over $E_*$. This is large enough so that for any spectrum $Y$, there are enough maps $X_\alpha \to Y$ so that the images of the maps $E_*X_\alpha \to E_*Y$ are jointly surjective.
• If we take a simplicial $O_\bullet$-algebra and apply $E$-homology, the resulting simplicial $E,E$-comodule lands in some algebraic category $\mathcal{A}$ of simplicial $E,E$-comodules with extra structure.\footnote{Namely, $\mathcal{A}$ is a category of algebras over some simplicial monad.}

• If we take a set of basic cells $X_\alpha$ and form the free simplicial $O_\bullet$-algebra on them, on $E$-homology we must get the free object on $E,X_\alpha$ in our algebraic category $\mathcal{A}$.

With these ingredients, they built an obstruction theory based on Dwyer–Kan–Stover’s resolution model categories [DKS93, Bou03]. This asks whether we can construct an algebra over the geometric realization $|O_\bullet|$ whose $E$-homology is a prescribed algebra $B_\ast$ over $\pi_0(E,O_\bullet)$, and produces obstructions to it. These live in obstruction groups: Ext groups calculated in the homotopical category $\mathcal{A}$. In rough, one tries to build a simplicial $O_\bullet$-algebra $X_\bullet$, one degree at a time, so that the chain complex $E_\ast(X_\bullet)$ is a resolution of $B_\ast$. The Ext-groups in question involve coefficients, and part of determining the algebra in this obstruction theory is determining what type of object Ext takes coefficients in.

Here are some specializations of the Goerss–Hopkins obstruction theory.

1. We could let $O_\bullet$ be the trivial operad, and $E = S$ so that $E_\ast(X) = \pi_\ast(X)$. A simplicial $O_\bullet$-algebra is simply a simplicial spectrum, our "basic cells" are the shifts $\Sigma^t S$, and the algebraic category $\mathcal{A}$ is the category of simplicial modules over the stable homotopy groups of spheres $\pi_\ast S$—which is equivalent, via the Dold–Kan correspondence, to chain complexes of $\pi_\ast S$-modules. The Ext-groups here are classical Ext-groups in $\pi_\ast S$-modules. Given a $\pi_\ast S$-module $M_\ast$, the Goerss–Hopkins obstruction theory for the existence of a spectrum $X$ with $\pi_\ast X \cong M_\ast$ takes place in the groups

$$\text{Ext}^t_{\pi_\ast S}(M_\ast, \Omega^t M_\ast).$$

Specifically, obstructions to existence occur when $t - s = -2$, and to uniqueness occur when $t - s = -1$.

The first obstruction occurs in $\text{Ext}^3_{\pi_\ast S}(M_\ast, \Omega M_\ast)$, and we can be relatively explicit about it. Start with a free resolution

$$0 \leftarrow M_\ast \leftarrow \oplus \Sigma^m \pi_\ast S \leftarrow \Sigma^1 \pi_\ast S \leftarrow \ldots$$

and lift $d_1$ to a map of spectra $\bigvee \Sigma^m S \leftarrow \bigvee \Sigma^t \pi_\ast S$, with cofiber $X^{(1)}$. This cofiber $X^{(1)}$ is our first approximation, and there is an exact sequence

$$0 \rightarrow M_\ast \rightarrow \pi_\ast X^{(1)} \rightarrow \Sigma \ker(d_1) \rightarrow 0.$$

If $X^{(1)}$ is going to eventually map to a spectrum $X$ so that $M_\ast \subset \pi_\ast X^{(1)}$ maps isomorphically to $\pi_\ast X$, this short exact sequence must be split over $\pi_\ast S$. Thus, a first obstruction takes place in the group

$$\text{Ext}^1_{\pi_\ast S}(\Sigma \ker(d_1), M_\ast) \equiv \text{Ext}^1_{\pi_\ast S}(\ker(d_1), \Omega M_\ast).$$
Applying the isomorphisms on $\Ext$ induced by the exact sequences

\[
0 \to \ker(d_1) \to \oplus \Sigma^n \pi_* \mathbb{S} \to \Im(d_1) \to 0 \quad \text{and} \\
0 \to \Im(d_1) \to \oplus \Sigma^m \pi_* \mathbb{S} \to M_* \to 0
\]

identifies this with an obstruction in $\Ext^3_{\pi_* \mathbb{S}}(M_*, \Omega_2 M_*)$.

If the sequence is split, then we use the splitting to construct a map $\bigvee \Sigma^p \mathbb{S} \to X^{(1)}$ whose image in homotopy groups is the complementary summand, take the cofiber $X^{(2)}$, and again examine the resulting homotopy groups to get a splitting obstruction in $\Ext^4_{\pi_* \mathbb{S}}(M_*, \Omega^2 M_*)$. This process then continues.  

2. Again letting $O_\bullet$ be the trivial operad, we could let $E$ be the Eilenberg–Mac Lane spectrum $H = H\mathbb{F}_p$. A simplicial $O_\bullet$-algebra is a simplicial spectrum, our “basic cells” are all the finite spectra, and the algebraic category $\mathcal{A}$ is the category of simplicial comodules over the mod-$p$ dual Steenrod algebra $A_*$—which is equivalent to chain complexes of $A_*$-comodules. The Ext-groups here are classical Ext-groups in $A_*$-comodules. Given an $A_*$-comodule $M_*$, the Goerss–Hopkins obstruction theory for the existence of a spectrum $X$ with $H_* X \cong M_*$ as an $A_*$-comodule takes place in the groups

$$\Ext^s_{A_*}(M_*, \Omega^t M_*)$$

Specifically, obstructions to existence occur when $t - s = -2$, and obstructions to uniqueness occur when $t - s = -1$.

A handy interpretation for uniqueness is as follows: given two such spectra $X$ and $Y$, these Ext groups form the $(-1)$-line of the Adams spectral sequence for calculating maps $X \to Y$. If $X$ and $Y$ are inequivalent, then any isomorphism $\phi: H_* X \to H_* Y$ doesn’t lift to a spectrum map, and so the corresponding element $\phi \in \Hom_{A_*}(H_* X, H_* Y)$ on the 0-line must support a differential that hits an element on the $-1$-line. Similar techniques are commonly used in the calculation of Picard groups [HMS94].

3. Complementary to this, we could let $O_\bullet$ be a nontrivial operad: the associative operad (viewed as a constant simplicial operad), but return to choosing $E = \mathbb{S}$. Then a simplicial $O_\bullet$-algebra is a simplicial object in associative ring spectra, our basic cells are shifts of the sphere, and the algebraic category $\mathcal{A}$ is the category of simplicial algebras over $\pi_* \mathbb{S}$. The Ext-groups of a $\pi_* \mathbb{S}$ algebra $B_*$ here have coefficients in a $B_*$-bimodule. Given a $\pi_* \mathbb{S}$-algebra $B_*$, the Goerss–Hopkins obstruction theory for the existence of an associative ring spectrum $R$ with $\pi_* R \cong B_*$ (as rings) takes place in certain groups

$$\Der^s_{assoc}(B_*, \Omega^t B_*)$$

\[\text{We note that there is absolutely nothing special about the stable homotopy category here, and we could carry this procedure out in the category of modules over an associative ring spectrum, the category of modules over a differential graded algebra, and many other triangulated categories that have generators.}\]

\[\text{Proving that this is homotopically adapted is now more work, and fails if we try to replace "associative" with "commutative" because the homotopy groups of the free commutative ring spectrum on $X$ are a more confusing functor of $\pi_* X$.}\]
Again, obstructions to existence occur when $t - s = -2$, and obstructions to uniqueness occur when $t - s = -1$. These are often called André–Quillen cohomology groups of an associative algebra with coefficients in a bimodule \cite{Qui70}, and are the nonabelian derived functors of derivations. They are also closely related to Hochschild cohomology: there is an exact sequence

$$0 \to HH^0(B_*, M_*) \to M_* \to \text{Der}^0(B_*, M_*) \to HH^1(B_*, M_*) \to 0$$

that identifies the first two Hochschild cohomology groups with central elements and derivations modulo principal derivations, and there are isomorphisms

$$\text{Der}^s(B_*, M_*) \to HH^{s+1}(B_*, M_*)$$

for $s > 0$.\footnote{Again, there is nothing special about $S$ here, and we could apply this to create an obstruction theory for algebras over a commutative ring spectrum $R$ or differential graded algebras over a commutative ring.}

4. We could mix these procedures, getting an obstruction theory for associative ring spectra based on mod-$p$ homology that lives in André–Quillen cohomology groups—for algebras in the category of $A_*$-comodules.

5. We should mention, at least in passing, the possibility of using a nonconstant operad $O_*$—for example, $O_*$ could be a simplicial resolution of the commutative operad. In the commutative case this tends to lead to an obstruction theory closely related to Robinson’s obstruction theory, whose obstruction groups are $\Gamma$-cohomology groups \cite{Rob03}. These obstruction groups have been examined in detail for $BP$ in \cite{Ric06}, and do not take the Dyer–Lashof operations into account. Part of the goal of this paper is to develop an obstruction theory which does.

\textbf{Remark 3.1.} The reader might wonder why we even bother to mention cohomology groups other than those containing obstructions. It is worth pointing out that these groups do more: the groups

$$\text{Ext}^s(E, X, \Omega^tE, Y)$$

serve as a tool for calculating the homotopy groups $\pi_{t-s} \text{Map}(X, Y)$ for spaces of maps between two realizations \cite{Bou03}. In the above discussion, these specialize to things such as the universal coefficient spectral sequence and the Adams spectral sequence.

\section{Homology-based obstructions to commutativity}

In this section we will discuss a specialization of the Goerss–Hopkins obstruction theory developed by Senger \cite{Sen}, whose full writeup is still forthcoming. Just as Serre’s method is improved to Adams’ by switching from a technique that proceeds one homotopy group at a time to one that uses all the cohomology information simultaneously, the Postnikov-based obstruction theory is sometimes improved by the Goerss–Hopkins method that can use both the Dyer–Lashof and Steenrod information simultaneously.
To set up this obstruction theory, we need a simplicial operad $O_*$ (which we choose to be a constant $E_{\infty}$-operad) and a homology theory (which we choose to be mod-$p$ homology $H_*$). A simplicial $O_*$-algebra is then a simplicial $E_{\infty}$ ring spectrum, and our “basic cells” are free algebras on finite spectra. Mod-$p$ homology satisfies the Adams–Atiyah condition, and the fact that this operad is homotopically adapted amounts to the following theorems.

**Theorem 4.1** ([BMMS86, §III.1]). For an $E_{\infty}$ ring spectrum $R$, the mod-$p$ homology $H_\ast R$ has the following structure.

1. It is a comodule over the mod-$p$ dual Steenrod algebra.
2. It is a graded-commutative ring.
3. It has Dyer–Lashof operations that satisfy the Cartan formula, Adem relations, and instability relations.
4. It satisfies the Nishida relations.

Following the literature, we will refer to such algebras as $AR$-algebras.

**Theorem 4.2** ([BMMS86, §IX.2]). The following results about $AR$-algebras hold:

1. The forgetful functor from $AR$-algebras to graded comodules has a left adjoint $Q$.
2. If a comodule $M$ has a basis over $F_p$ of elements $e_i$ in degrees $n_i$, then $Q(M)$ is a free graded-commutative algebra on the elements $P(e_i)$ such that $P$ is an admissible monomial in the Dyer–Lashof algebra of excess at least $n_i$.
3. If we write $P(X)$ for the free $E_{\infty}$ ring spectrum on $X$, then the homology $H_\ast P(X)$ is a free $AR$-algebra: the natural map $H_\ast X \to H_\ast P(X)$ induces a natural isomorphism $Q(H_\ast X) \to H_\ast P(X)$.

As a result, the mod-$p$ homology of simplicial $E_{\infty}$ ring spectra takes place in the category of simplicial $AR$-algebras. The Ext-groups of an $AR$-algebra $B_\ast$ are defined in the literature as $\text{Ext}^s_{AR}(B_\ast, \Omega^t B_\ast)$, with coefficients $f$ that $Q^s(x) = 0$ for $s \leq |x|$.

**Theorem 4.3** ([Sen]). Given $B_\ast$, an $AR$-algebra, there are Goerss–Hopkins obstruction groups

$$\text{Der}^s_{AR}(B_\ast, \Omega^t B_\ast)$$

calculated in the category of simplicial $AR$-algebras. The groups with $t - s = -2$ contain an iterative sequence of obstructions to realizing $B_\ast$ by an $E_{\infty}$ ring spectrum $R$ such that $H_\ast R \cong B_\ast$, and the groups with $t - s = -1$ contain obstructions to uniqueness.

From this point forward, it will be our goal to give methods to calculate the nonabelian Ext-groups $\text{Der}^s_{AR}$ in specific cases and to interpret elements in them as concrete obstructions.

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5Because the origin of this subject is in studying the homology of infinite loop spaces rather than the homology of $E_{\infty}$ ring spectra, the definitions of $AR$-algebras in the literature often involve connectivity assumptions and only discuss Dyer–Lashof operations of nonnegative degree.
5 Tools for calculation

In this section, we will begin discussing how [Sen] reduces the Goerss–Hopkins obstruction theory for the Brown–Peterson spectrum $BP$ and its truncated versions $BP(\langle n \rangle)$ to more straightforward calculations. We need to calculate the obstruction groups

$$\text{Der}_A^*(H_*BP, \Omega^t H_*BP).$$

We begin by recalling the structure of $H_*BP$ as a comodule over the dual Steenrod algebra. The dual Steenrod algebra $A_*$ has quotient Hopf algebras, given by exterior algebras $E(n)_* = \Lambda[\tau_0, \tau_1, \ldots, \tau_n]$ with $|\tau_i| = 2p^i - 1$. (At the prime 2, $\tau_i$ is the image of $\xi_i$.) When $n = \infty$, we get a Hopf algebra $E_*$. The homology $H_*BP(\langle n \rangle)$ can be identified with a coextended comodule:

$$H_*BP(\langle n \rangle) \cong A_*E(\langle n \rangle)_*F_p.$$  

This coextension functor is right adjoint to the forgetful functor from $A_*$-comodules to $E(n)_*$-comodules. To proceed, we need to know that this adjunction is compatible with Dyer–Lashof operations.

**Proposition 5.1 ([Bak15, 7.3]).** Let $p = 2$, and let $M_r$ be the Milnor primitive of degree $2^r - 1$ dual to $\xi_r$ in the Milnor basis of the dual Steenrod algebra. Then the Nishida relations imply

$$M_r Q^s = (s + 1)Q^{s - 2^r + 1} + \sum_{0 \leq k < r} Q^{s - 2^r + 2p^k} M_k. \quad (5.1)$$

The existence of this formula means that it is possible to define a category of $E(n)_*$-comodule algebras or $E_*$-comodule algebras with Dyer–Lashof operations, which we will refer to as $E(n)R$-algebras or $ER$-algebras respectively. These are compatible across $n$.

**Proposition 5.2.** The forgetful functors from $A_*$-comodules to $E_*$-comodules and $E(n)_*$-comodules lift to ones from $AR$-algebras to $ER$-algebras and $E(n)R$-algebras. These functors have exact right adjoints, given by $A_*E(n)_*, (\cdot)$ and $A_*E_*, (\cdot)$ on the underlying comodules.

**Remark 5.3.** There are analogous equations to (5.1) at odd primes:

$$M_r Q^s = \pm \beta Q^{s - 2^r + 1} + \sum_{0 \leq k < r} Q^{s - 2^r + 2p^k} M_k,$n

$$M_r \beta Q^s = \pm \sum_{0 \leq k < r} \beta Q^{s - 2^r + 2p^k} M_k.$$n

Because these calculations only depend on mod-$p$ homology, they apply to the generalized $BP(n)$ as defined in [LN12, §3].

From here forward, rather than using the shift operator $\Omega^t$ we will often regard the obstruction groups as bigraded. The number $s$ is the filtration degree, and the number $t - s$ is the total degree.
We have not verified the signs ourselves and so are not comfortable stating them here. We are unable to locate this result in the literature but have been assured that both it and Proposition 5.1 have been known for some time.

Due to exactness of both functors in this free-forgetful adjunction, the adjunction carries forward to an isomorphism of Ext-groups.

**Proposition 5.4.** For any $AR$-algebra $R$ with an augmentation $R \to A, \square_E, \mathbb{F}_p$, there is an isomorphism

$$\text{Der}^x_{AR}(R, A, \square_E, \mathbb{F}_p) \cong \text{Der}^x_E(R, \mathbb{F}_p).$$

Similarly, for any $AR$-algebra $R$ with an augmentation $R \to A, \square_{E(n)}, \mathbb{F}_p$, there is an isomorphism

$$\text{Der}^x_{AR}(R, A, \square_{E(n)}, \mathbb{F}_p) \cong \text{Der}^x_{E(n)}(R, \mathbb{F}_p).$$

**Remark 5.5.** It’s worth noting that there are two $ER$-module (or $E(n)R$-module) structures on $\mathbb{F}_p$: one has $Q^0$ acting as the identity, and the other has $Q^0$ acting trivially. The group appearing above is the former. Only the latter has deloopings: the shifts $\Sigma^t\mathbb{F}_p$ for $t \geq 0$ must have $Q^0 = 0$ to satisfy the instability relations. Therefore, the obstruction groups $\text{Der}^q(R, \Omega^tA, \square_E, \mathbb{F}_p)$ do not, a priori, extend to an integer grading in $t$. We will later show that, in the range of interest, both modules have the same cohomology, and the added integer grading is very useful in assembling a systematic calculation.

The groups $\text{Der}^q_{E(n)\mathcal{R}}(R, \mathbb{F}_p)$ can be calculated as follows: resolve $R$ by a simplicial $E(n)R$-algebra which is free in each simplicial degree on some free $E(n)$-comodule, take indecomposables in each simplicial degree, apply $\text{Hom}(\cdot, \mathbb{F}_p)$ in the category of $E(n)$-comodules with Dyer–Lashof operations to get a cosimplicial abelian group, and take the cohomology groups of the associated cochain complex. This description as a composite allows us to get a Grothendieck spectral sequence.

**Proposition 5.6.** For any $E(n)R$-algebra $R$ with an augmentation $R \to \mathbb{F}_p$, there is a spectral sequence

$$\text{Ext}^p_{E(n)\mathcal{R}-\text{mod}}(A_Q(R), \mathbb{F}_p) \Rightarrow \text{Der}^{p+q}_{E(n)\mathcal{R}}(R, \mathbb{F}_p),$$

where $A_Q(R)$ are the ordinary André–Quillen homology groups of $R$ (the nonabelian derived functors of the indecomposables functor $Q$). In particular, if the underlying algebra of $R$ is a free graded-commutative algebra, this degenerates to an isomorphism

$$\text{Ext}^p_{E(n)\mathcal{R}-\text{mod}}(QR, \mathbb{F}_p) \cong \text{Der}^p_{E(n)\mathcal{R}}(R, \mathbb{F}_p).$$

In particular, these propositions can be applied to the $BP(n)$.

**Corollary 5.7.** For any $n \geq m \geq -1$, there is an isomorphism

$$\text{Der}^x_{AR}(H, BP(n), H, BP(m)) \cong \text{Ext}^x_{E(n)\mathcal{R}-\text{mod}}(QH, BP(n), \mathbb{F}_p).$$

---

As we will see shortly, because $E(n)$ is finite-dimensional its comodules are equivalent to $E(n)$-modules, and so there is an ample supply of free comodules. This is more problematic for $A_\star$-comodules or $E_\star$-comodules.
For later calculations, it will be helpful to know the primitives in $H_\ast BP$.

**Proposition 5.8.** The $ER$-module $QH_\ast BP$ has a basis consisting of the elements $[\xi_i^2]$ in degree $2i^2 + 1$ at the prime 2, and $[\xi_i]$ in degree $2p^i - 2$ at odd primes. These are acted on trivially by the Milnor primitives. The Dyer–Lashof operations satisfy $Q^{2j - 2i}[\xi_i^2] = [\xi_j^2]$ for all $j > i$ at the prime 2.

**Proof.** The identification of $H_\ast BP$ as $\mathbb{F}_2[\xi_1^2, \xi_2^2, \ldots]$ or $\mathbb{F}_p[\xi_1, \xi_2, \ldots]$ makes the identification of the indecomposables clear. Since the generating classes are all in even degrees and the Milnor primitives are of odd degree, the Milnor primitives must act trivially. The remaining formula is a consequence of the calculations of Steinberger [BMMS86, §III].

\[\square\]

\section{Koszul duality}

Now that we have reduced to calculations of $\text{Ext}$ groups in a category $E(n)R$-mod of graded modules, we should examine the structure on these modules: it is now much simpler. Because $E(n)$, is finite-dimensional, an $E(n)$-comodule structure is precisely the same as an $E(n)$-module structure—an action of the exterior algebra $\Lambda[M_0, \ldots, M_n]$ generated by the Milnor primitives. Thus, an $E(n)R$-module $N$ is almost the same as a module over a graded ring: the graded ring with generators $M_k$ and $Q_s$ subject to quadratic relations.

We now begin systematically specializing to the prime 2, where these relations take the following form:

\begin{align*}
Q^r Q^s &= \sum \binom{i}{2i-r} Q^{r+s-1} Q^t \quad \text{if } r > 2s, \\
M_r M_t &= M_t M_r \quad \text{if } r > s, \\
M_r^2 &= 0, \\
M_r Q^s &= (s - 1)Q^{s-2^r+1} + \sum_{0 \leq k < r} Q^{s-2^r+2^k} M_k.
\end{align*}

However, $E(n)R$-modules satisfy one further instability relation:

$Q^s x = 0$ if $s \leq |x|$.

The relations above mean that the operators on $E(n)R$-modules have a canonical basis of monomials of the form $M_0^{a_0} M_1^{\epsilon_1} \ldots M_n^{a_n} Q^{a_1} \ldots Q^{a_m}$, where $a_i \leq 2a_{i+1}$ and $\epsilon_i \in \{0, 1\}$. If $E(n)R$-modules were actually modules over a graded ring, this graded ring would be a quadratic algebra and this basis would be a PBW-basis in the sense of [Pri70]. Under these circumstances, there would be a Koszul complex calculating $\text{Ext}$, based on a "Koszul dual" quadratic algebra with differential.

Despite the fact that we are not quite in the case of a quadratic algebra, Senger showed that Priddy’s proof still works. (This technique was originally carried out for the nonnegative-degree Dyer–Lashof algebra by Miller [Mil78].)
Proposition 6.1 ([Sen]). For $N$ an $E(n)R$-module, there is a Koszul complex $C^*(N)$ calculating $\text{Ext}^*_E(N, \mathbb{F}_p)$. Let $N$ have basis $\{y^i\}$ with dual basis $\{y_i\}$. The Koszul complex $C^*(N)$ has a basis consisting of monomials

$$\lambda v_0^{k_0} v_1^{k_1} \ldots v_n^{k_n} R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y^i$$

where $k_i \geq 0$, $a_i \geq 2a_{i+1}$, and $-|y^i| + 2 \leq a_m$. We refer to such monomials as admissible.

Here the operators $v_i$ of total degree $2i + 1 - 2$ are dual to $M_i$, $R^a$ of total degree $-a$ is dual to $Q^a$, and $\lambda$ of total degree 0 is dual to the unit of $\mathbb{F}_2$. These are subject to the following relations:

$$R^a R^b = \sum \left( b - 1 - c \right) R^{a+b-c} R^c \text{ if } a < 2b$$

$$R^a v_i = \sum_{i<k \leq n} v_k R^{a-2i+2k}$$

$$v_i v_j = v_j v_i$$

The operators $R^a$ are also subject to the instability constraint: the operator $R^a$ can only be applied to an element $z$ if $-|z| < a + 1$.

The differential in the Koszul complex is determined by relations

$$dR^a(x) = (a+1) \sum_{0 \leq k \leq n} v_k R^{a+2k-1}(x) + R^a(dx) \text{ and }$$

$$dv_i x = v_i dx,$$

$$d\lambda x = \begin{cases} \lambda R^1 x + \lambda(dx) & \text{if } |x| > 0, \\ \lambda(dx) & \text{if } |x| \leq 0, \end{cases}$$

and the fact that the differential on the $y^i$ is dual to the action of the $Q^a$ and $M_i$ on $N$.

The element $\lambda$, with its differential, appears precisely due to the fact that $Q^0$ acts by the identity on the coefficient group $\mathbb{F}_p$. However, we have the following simplifying result.

Theorem 6.2. For $N$ an $E(n)R$-module, the groups $\text{Der}^*(N; \mathbb{F}_p)$ agree in total degree $t - s < 0$ for the two different actions of $Q^0$ on $\mathbb{F}_p$.

For the zero action on $\mathbb{F}_p$, there is a Koszul complex $C^*(N)$ calculating $\text{Ext}^*_E(N, \mathbb{F}_p)$. Let $N$ have basis $\{y^i\}$ with dual basis $\{y_i\}$. The Koszul complex $C^*(N)$ has a basis consisting of monomials

$$v_0^{k_0} v_1^{k_1} \ldots v_n^{k_n} R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y^i$$

where $k_i \geq 0$, $a_i \geq 2a_{i+1}$, and $-|y^i| + 2 \leq a_m$. We refer to such monomials as admissible.

These are subject to the following relations:

$$R^a R^b = \sum \left( b - 1 - c \right) R^{a+b-c} R^c \text{ if } a < 2b$$

$$R^a v_i = \sum_{i<k \leq n} v_k R^{a-2i+2k}$$

$$v_i v_j = v_j v_i$$
The operators $R^a$ are also subject to the instability constraint: the operator $R^a$ can only be applied to an element $z$ if $-|z| < a + 1$.

The differential in the Koszul complex is determined by relations

\[ dR^a(x) = (a + 1) \sum_{0 \leq k \leq n} v_k R^{a+2^k-1}(x) + R^a(dx) \text{ and} \]

\[ dv_i x = v_i dx \]

and the fact that the differential on the $y^i$ is dual to the action of the $Q^i$ and $M_k$ on $N$.

Proof. This follows because $\lambda$ preserves the differential except on classes in total degree $t - s > 0$, and hence does not alter the Goerss–Hopkins obstruction groups in question. $\square$

This gives us a large but explicit cochain complex that calculates our Goerss–Hopkins obstruction groups for the realization of $BP(n)$. The groups where potential obstructions live are in total grading $-2$.

### 7 Filtrations and stability

The Koszul complex calculating these obstruction groups for $BP(n)$ is relatively large and involves complicated interaction between the $R^a$ and $v_i$. In addition, the obstruction groups that we described in the previous section depend on $n$ very strongly. This is part and parcel of how we’re working: we’re using the Adams filtration rather than the Postnikov filtration. For any two different values of $n$, the Adams towers for $BP(n)$ are quite different as soon as one reaches filtration 1, and so our multiplicative obstruction theory doesn’t really stabilize as $n$ grows.

Fortunately, both of these problems can be addressed to some degree. There are several natural filtrations on this complex obtained by assigning degrees to the $v_i$, and this allows us to calculate by an inductive method.

**Proposition 7.1.** For any $0 \leq k \leq n$ and any $E(n)R$-module $N$, the Koszul complex has quotient complexes

\[ D^k = C^\ast(N)/(v_{k+1}, \ldots, v_n) \]

and for $0 \leq k < n$ there are Bockstein spectral sequences

\[ H^\ast(D^k) \otimes \mathbb{F}_p[v_{k+1}, \ldots, v_m] \Rightarrow H^\ast(D^m). \]

Proof. The quotient complex exists because the $v_i$ preserve the differential. We obtain the Bockstein spectral sequence in question from a filtration on the Koszul complex, obtained by giving the elements $v_{k+1} \ldots v_n$ grading 1 and $v_0 \ldots v_k, R^a$, and $y_m$ grading zero. The associated graded is $D^k \otimes \mathbb{F}_p[v_{k+1}, \ldots, v_n]$ with differential induces by that on $D^k$, giving the $E_1$-term in question. $\square$

In terms of Ext-groups, these have concrete interpretations. For any $k \leq n$ and any $E(n)R$-module $N$, we can view $N$ as an $E(k)R$-module, and $D^k$ is a Koszul complex.
calculating Ext in $E(k)R$-modules. Thus, this can be viewed as a collection of Bockstein spectral sequences

$$\text{Ext}_{E(k)R\text{-mod}}(N, F_p) \otimes F_p[v_{k+1}, \ldots, v_m] \Rightarrow \text{Ext}_{E(m)R\text{-mod}}(N, F_p).$$

We now specialize to what happens when we consider indecomposables. Consider the sequence of maps

$$H_* BP \rightarrow \cdots \rightarrow H_* BP(2) \rightarrow H_* BP(1) \rightarrow H_* BP(0) \rightarrow H_* BP(-1).$$

This creates an array of Ext-groups:

$$\text{Ext}_{AR}(H_* BP(-1), H_* BP(-1))$$

$$\text{Ext}_{AR}(H_* BP(0), H_* BP(-1)) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{AR}(H_* BP(0), H_* BP(0))$$

$$\text{Ext}_{AR}(H_* BP(1), H_* BP(-1)) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{AR}(H_* BP(1), H_* BP(0)) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{AR}(H_* BP(1), H_* BP(1))$$

$$\vdots \quad \vdots \quad \vdots$$

After our chain of isomorphisms, these can be re-identified:

$$\text{Ext}_{E(-1)R\text{-mod}}(QH_* BP(-1), F_p)$$

$$\text{Ext}_{E(-1)R\text{-mod}}(QH_* BP(0), F_p) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{E(0)R\text{-mod}}(QH_* BP(0), F_p)$$

$$\text{Ext}_{E(-1)R\text{-mod}}(QH_* BP(1), F_p) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{E(0)R\text{-mod}}(QH_* BP(1), F_p) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{E(1)R\text{-mod}}(QH_* BP(1), F_p)$$

$$\vdots \quad \vdots \quad \vdots$$

Each Bockstein spectral sequence requires one of the terms in this diagram and converges to the one immediately to its right. Because the degrees of the elements in the Koszul complex in any column involve only a finite list $v_0, \ldots, v_n$ of positive-degree operators, and $QH_* BP(n) \rightarrow QH_* BP(m)$ is always an isomorphism in large degrees, the vertical towers do stabilize to the tower of groups

$$\text{Ext}_{E(-1)R\text{-mod}}(QH_* BP, F_p) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{E(0)R\text{-mod}}(QH_* BP, F_p) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{E(1)R\text{-mod}}(QH_* BP, F_p) \leftarrow \cdots,$$

or equivalently the tower

$$\text{Ext}_{AR}(H_* BP, H_* BP(-1)) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{AR}(H_* BP, H_* BP(0)) \leftarrow \text{Ext}_{AR}(H_* BP, H_* BP(1)) \leftarrow \cdots$$
whose limit is roughly \( \text{Ext}_{AR}(H, BP, H, BP) \). \(^9\)

Since we’re interested in \( BP \) anyway, computing in this grid gives us a workaround for problems that don’t show up for \( E(n)R \)-algebras, with the Koszul complex and with convergence, when using \( ER \)-algebras. In practice this means that we will be calculating

\[
\text{Ext}_{AR}(H, BP, H, BP(n)) \cong \text{Ext}_{E(n)R-\text{mod}}(QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_p).
\]

and calculating Bockstein spectral sequences

\[
\text{Ext}_{AR}(H, BP, H, BP(n)) \otimes \mathbb{F}_p[v_n] \Rightarrow \text{Ext}_{AR}(H, BP, H, BP(n + 1))
\]

to get at the limiting value.

8 The critical group and secondary operations

We now consider the critical group: the first Goerss–Hopkins obstruction group

\[
\text{Ext}^3_{E(n)R-\text{mod}}(QH, BP, \Omega F_2)
\]

that could support an obstruction class. The Koszul complex, in this degree, had a basis of those monomials of the form

\[
v_i v_j v_k y_m, \quad v_i v_j R^a y_m, \quad v_i R^a R^b y_m, \quad \text{and} \quad R^a R^b R^c y_m
\]

of total degree \(-2\), where \( y_k \) is dual to \( [\xi^2_k] \in QH, BP \). Our calculations in the remainder of this paper will determine exactly what has survived to \( \text{Ext} \) and what has not. The first type supports a differential if \( m > 1 \) and is usually in degree greater than \(-2\) if \( m = 1 \); the second type only survives if it is in odd total degree; the fourth type is always in a large negative degree. This leaves us only with the third type to carefully check.

**Theorem 8.1.** The first obstruction group

\[
\text{Ext}^3_{E(n)R-\text{mod}}(QH, BP, \Omega F_2)
\]

has a basis of classes of the following forms: the class \( v_i^2 y_i \), and those of form \( v_i R^a R^b y_i \)

where \( i \geq 3 \), \( a \) and \( b \) are odd, \( b \geq 7 \), \( a > 2b \), and \( a + b = 2^{i+1} - 2 \).

The remaining sections will be dedicated to proving this result.

**Corollary 8.2.** The minimal value of \( i \) such that an admissible monomial \( v_i R^a R^b y_i \)

appears is when \( i = 4 \); the only monomials of this type are \( v_4 R^{23} R^7 y_1 \) and \( v_4 R^{21} R^9 y_1 \).

It falls to us now to determine what these obstructions mean. In the Koszul complex, these are basis elements that detect the elements \([M_4]Q^{22}Q^6[\xi^2_1] \) and \([M_4]Q^{20}Q^4[\xi^2_1] \)

in a bar resolution for \( QH, BP \) in \( E(n)R-\text{mod} \). How do we interpret these?

The first of these, \( v_4 R^{23} R^7 y_1 \), relies on a secondary operation based on the Adem relations for \( Q^{22}Q^6 \) and a relation satisfied by \( Q^6 \xi^2_1 \). This potential obstruction is

\(^9\)Modulo a \( \lim^1 \)-issue.
precisely the one described in the introduction, and it is zero because it would also be an obstruction to the existence of an $E_\infty$-ring structure on $MU$.

Fortunately, we have another potential basis element $v_i R^{2i} R^s y_1$, which would detect some kind of problem involving a relation satisfied by $Q_n^k(\xi^2_1)$ in $HBP$, the Adem relation for $Q^{2k} Q^s$, and the Milnor primitive $M_k$. It gives us a place to look, and looking here leads us to the start of [Law17].

9 Calculation setup for $BP$

It’s time to get down to the business of calculation. In this section we’ll begin the process of calculating $\text{Ext}_{AR}(H, BP, H, BP(n))$ inductively at the prime 2. This uses knowledge of the structure of the indecomposables $QH, BP$ as an $ER$-module. We begin by writing down the Koszul complexes that calculate Ext.

**Proposition 9.1.** Let $y_k$ be dual to $[\xi^2_1] \in QH, BP$. The Koszul complex calculating $\text{Ext}_{ER}(QH, BP, F_2)$ has a basis of monomials

$$v_0^k v_1^{k_1} \ldots v_n^{k_n} R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_k$$

ranging over $k_i, a_i, and k$ such that $k_i \geq 0, k \geq 1, a_i \geq 2a_{i+1}$, and $2^{k+1} \leq a_m$.

The differential is determined by

$$dy_k = \sum_{j < k} R^{k+1-2^{j+1}+1} y_j,$$

$$du_i x = v_i dx,$$

$$dR^a(x) = \begin{cases} R^a(dx) & \text{if } a \text{ is odd,} \\ \sum_{0 \leq k \leq n} v_k R^{a+2^k-1} x + R^a(dx) & \text{if } a \text{ is even,} \end{cases}$$

and the relation

$$R^a u_i x = \sum_{i < j \leq n} v_j R^{a-2^j+2^i} x.$$ 

**Proof.** This is a direct application of Theorem 6.2 to the module $N = QH, BP$. □

We can draw several immediate conclusions from the relations in Proposition 9.1.

**Corollary 9.2.** Any admissible monomials of the form $v_0^k v_1^{k_1} \ldots v_n^{k_n} R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1$, where the $a_1, \ldots, a_m$ are odd, are permanent cycles in the $E(n)$-Koszul complex.

**Corollary 9.3.** The Koszul complex has a filtration under “degree in $R$”: if we say that an admissible monomial $v_0^k v_1^{k_1} \ldots v_n^{k_n} R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_k$ has weight $m$, then the Koszul differential $d$ increases weight, and preserves it on classes ending in $y_1$.

10The calculations we will describe in the following sections determine many more of the Goerss–Hopkins obstruction groups than the critical group that we need. We have this calculation available, and it helps to illuminate the critical group by examining the algebraic structure in the large.
10 First calculations: $n = -1$

Our base case for calculation is when $n = -1$, where things simplify greatly: there is no interference from the $v_i$ or differentials on $R^a$.

**Proposition 10.1.** The Koszul complex calculating $\text{Ext}_{E(1)^{-1}}(R \mod \langle QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_2 \rangle)$ has a basis of monomials

$$R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_k$$

ranging over $a_i$ and $k$ such that $k \geq 1$, $a_i \geq 2a_{i+1}$, and $2^{k+1} \leq a_m$.

The differential is determined by

$$dR^a(x) = R^a(dx)$$

and

$$dy_k = \sum_{j<k} R^{2^{k+1} - 2^{j+1}} y_j.$$ 

This allows us to start charting things up and doing the work of calculating the result. The first portion of the Koszul complex appears in Figure 1, with operations on $y_1$ indicated by classes in black.

**Proposition 10.2.** The $\text{Ext}$-groups $\text{Ext}_{E(1)^{-1}}(QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_2)$ have a basis of admissible monomials

$$R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1$$

(meaning, monomials such that $a_i \geq 2a_{i+1}$ and $a_m \geq 4$) which do not end in any of the sequences $R^5 y_1, R^9 R^4 y_1, R^{17} R^8 R^4 y_1, \ldots$.

**Remark 10.3.** An examination of the Adem relations for the operations $R^a$ finds that this result means that we essentially have a “free unstable module” over the $R^a$ subject to one relation: $R^5 y_1 = 0$. For instance, the Adem relations imply $R^8 R^5 = R^9 R^4$, $R^{16} R^9 R^4 = R^{17} R^8 R^4$, and so on.
Proof sketch. We filter the Koszul complex by putting $y_i$ into filtration $i$ so that in the associated graded complex the differential becomes $d(y_i) = R^{2^i+1}y_{i-1}$. The claim is then that, on the associated graded, this is exact except in filtration zero.

In degree zero of the associated graded, we have everything of the form $R^i y_1 = R^{a_1} y_2 \cdots R^{a_k} y_1$, and all of those are permanent cycles.

In degree one of the associated graded, we have $d(y_1) = R^8 y_1$. (We remark that the elements $R^i y_2$ are only defined when the last term is $R^8$ or higher.) The map $R^4 \mapsto R^8 R^5$ has image consisting of the right multiples of $R^5$. It is also injective on anything where the admissible $R^8$ ends with $R^{10}$ or higher, because then $R^8 R^5$ is still admissible. Thus we only have to see what happens to the admissible monomials that end in $R^8$ or $R^8$.

The Adem relations say $R^9 R^5 = 0$, so all admissible monomials ending in $R^9$ are in the kernel.

The Adem relations also say that $R^8 R^2 = R^9 R^8$. The admissible monomials $R^8 R^8$ where $B$ ends in $R^{18}$ or higher map isomorphically to admissible monomials of the form $R^8 R^9 R^8$. That now just leaves us checking admissible monomials that end in $R^{17} R^8$ or $R^{16} R^8$.

The Adem relations say $R^{17} R^8 = 0$, so anything ending in $R^{17} R^8 y_2$ is in the kernel. The Adem relations also say that $R^{16} R^9 = R^{17} R^8$. We inductively repeat this pattern.

We ultimately find that the kernel in grading one consists of any admissible monomials $R^4 y_2$ where $R^4$ ends in $R^0$, $R^{17} R^8$, $R^{13} R^{16} R^8$, $R^{15} R^{15} R^{16} R^8$, and so on. These are precisely all the right multiples of $R^9$.

We then look at grading two, where we have $d(y_2) = R^9 y_2$; all the right multiples of $R^9$ are in the image. We run the exact same computation and find that the kernel consists of all the multiples of $R^{17}$. This procedure continues indefinitely. \qed

Remark 10.4. This is very similar to a computation of the topological André–Quillen cohomology of $HF_2$ stated in [Laz01] and determined by alternative means in Hoyer’s thesis [Hoy14].

The final answer provides us with a bit of relief: the cohomology of the Koszul complex is actually a lot less complicated to describe than the Koszul complex itself.

Remark 10.5. It is tempting to hope that the Koszul complex is quasi-isomorphic to its quotient by all the $y_i$ for $i > 1$ and by the relation $R^2 y_1 = 0$. Unfortunately, this is not the case. For example, the differentials $d(y_2) = R^2 y_1$ and $d(y_3) = R^2 y_2 + R^4 y_1$ in the Koszul complex show that the Koszul complex has an identity of secondary operations $\langle R^9, R^5, y_1 \rangle = R^{13} y_1$ not satisfied in the quotient complex.

11 Further calculations: $n = 0$

To calculate the next Ext-groups, we can feed our previous Ext-calculation into a Bockstein spectral sequence.

Proposition 11.1. The $E_1$-term of the Bockstein spectral sequence

$$\text{Ext}_{E_1}(QH_*, BP, \mathbb{F}_2) \otimes \mathbb{F}_2[u_0] \Rightarrow \text{Ext}_{E_1}(QH_*, BP, \mathbb{F}_2)$$
has a basis of admissible monomials

\[ v_0^k R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1 \]

(except for those which end in \( R^5, R^9 R^4, \ldots \)) with \( v_0 \)-linear differential satisfying

\[ dR^a(x) = (a+1)v_0R^{a+1}x + R^a(dx) \]

and the rule

\[ R^a v_0 = 0. \]

In particular, these rules make it easy to apply the differential to any element in our basis:

\[ d(v_0^k R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } a_1 \text{ is odd} \\ v_0^{k+1} R^{a_1+1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1 & \text{if } a_1 \text{ is even} \end{cases} \]

In essence, our admissible monomials that start with \( R^{even} \) are attempting to make the admissible monomials that start with \( R^{odd} \) into \( v_0 \)-torsion elements. Calculating the \( d_1 \)-differential is an exercise in being careful about edge cases.

**Proposition 11.2.** The Ext-groups

\[ \text{Ext}_{E(0) \text{-mod}}(QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_2) \]

are a direct sum of copies of two types of terms:

1. \( v_0 \)-torsion copies of \( \mathbb{F}_2 \) indexed by those admissible monomials \( R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1 \) with \( a_1 \) odd which do not end in any of the sequences \( R^5 y_1, R^9 R^4 y_1, R^{17} R^8 R^4 y_1, \) and so on, and

2. copies of \( \mathbb{F}_2[v_0] \) indexed by the admissible monomials \( y_1, R^4 y_1, R^8 R^4 y_1, R^{16} R^8 R^4 y_1, \) and so on.

The initial portion of these Ext-groups is sketched in Figure 2.

**Proof sketch.** The first observation is that if \( R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} \) is an admissible monomial and \( a_1 \) is odd, then \( R^{a_1-1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} \) is also an admissible monomial. Therefore, every admissible monomial starting with an odd term is a permanent cycle that becomes annihilated by \( v_0 \).

Almost all of the admissible monomials \( R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} \) where \( a_1 \) is even, by contrast, support differentials and do not survive the spectral sequence. The only exception is when the admissible monomial \( R^{a_1+1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} \) is already zero, and this occurs only when it ends with one of the sequences \( R^5, R^9 R^4, R^{17} R^8 R^4, \) and so on. In this case, there are two possibilities: either \( R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} \) also ends with this sequence and it was already the zero monomial, or it is one of the monomials \( R^5, R^9 R^4, R^{17} R^8 R^4, \) and so on. These monomials are permanent cycles and produce infinite \( v_0 \)-towers. \( \square \)
Figure 2: Part of the Ext-groups for $n = 0$

12 Further calculations: $n = 1$

There are two useful spectral sequences for computing $\text{Ext}_{E^{(1)}}(QH,BP,\mathbb{F}_2)$ based on our previous work. Playing the information in these two spectral sequences off each other provides a useful technique for resolving hidden extensions.

The first spectral sequence is the Bockstein spectral sequence

$$\text{Ext}_{E^{(0)}}(QH,BP,\mathbb{F}_2) \otimes \mathbb{F}_2[v_0] \Rightarrow \text{Ext}_{E^{(1)}}(QH,BP,\mathbb{F}_2)$$

The second spectral sequence is the filtration on the Koszul complex that puts both $v_0$ and $v_1$ in filtration 1 simultaneously:

$$\text{Ext}_{E^{(1)}}(QH,BP,\mathbb{F}_2) \otimes \mathbb{F}_2[v_0, v_1] \Rightarrow \text{Ext}_{E^{(1)}}(QH,BP,\mathbb{F}_2)$$

This has an $E_1$-term with a basis of monomials

$$v_0^k v_1^l R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1$$

(except for those which are right multiples of $R^3$) with $\mathbb{F}_2[v_0, v_1]$-linear differential satisfying the following relations:

$$dR^a(x) = (a + 1)(v_0 R^{a+1}x + v_1 R^{a+3}x) + R^a(dx)$$

$$R^a(v_1 x) = 0$$

$$R^a(v_0 x) = v_1 R^{a+2}x$$

In particular, these rules make it mechanical to apply the differential to any element in our basis:

$$d(R^{a_1} R^{a_2} x) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } a_1 \text{ and } a_2 \text{ are odd} \\ v_1 R^{a_1+2} R^{a_2+1} x & \text{if } a_1 \text{ is odd and } a_2 \text{ is even} \\ v_0 R^{a_1+1} R^{a_2} x + v_1 R^{a_1+3} R^{a_2} x & \text{if } a_1 \text{ is even and } a_2 \text{ is odd} \\ v_0 R^{a_1+1} R^{a_2} x + v_1 R^{a_1+3} R^{a_2} x + v_1 R^{a_1+2} R^{a_2+1} x & \text{if } a_1 \text{ and } a_2 \text{ are even} \end{cases}$$
We will mostly use this to inform us about differentials and hidden extensions in the $v_1$-Bockstein spectral sequence. For example, we obtain the following results:

**Lemma 12.1.** In the $v_1$-Bockstein spectral sequence, there are $d_1$-differentials

$$d(R^{a_1} R^{a_2} R^{a_3} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1) = v_1 R^{a_1+2} R^{a_2+1} R^{a_3} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1$$

when $a_1$ is odd and $a_2$ is even.

**Lemma 12.2.** In the $v_1$-Bockstein spectral sequence, when $x$ is a cycle there are hidden extensions

$$v_0 R^{a_1} R^{a_2} x = v_1 R^{a_1+2} R^{a_2} x$$

when $R^{a_1} R^{a_2}$ is admissible and $a_2$ is odd.

**Proof.** The differential

$$d(R^{a_1-1} R^{a_2} x) = v_0 R^{a_1} R^{a_2} x + v_1 R^{a_1+2} R^{a_2} x,$$

for $x$ a cycle in the filtered Koszul complex, establishes this relation. \qed

Just as in the previous section, we can now determine the result of the $v_1$-Bockstein spectral sequence by a careful examination of edge cases.

**Proposition 12.3.** The Ext-groups

$$\Ext_{E(1)R}^{*,*}(QH, BP_{2})$$

are a direct sum of copies of three types of terms:

1. a free copy of $\mathbb{F}_2[v_0, v_1]$ generated by $y_1$,

2. $(v_0, v_1)$-$t$-torsion copies of $\mathbb{F}_2$ indexed by those admissible monomials $R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1$ with $a_1$ and $a_2$ odd which do not end in any of the sequences $R^5 y_1$, $R^9 R^4 y_1$, $R^{17} R^8 R^4 y_1$, and so on, and

3. $(v_0, v_1)$-sawtooth” patterns

$$\mathbb{F}_2[v_0, v_1]/(R^{2k+1} x) = v_1 R^{2k+3} x$$

as $R^{2k+1} x$ range over admissible monomials with $x$ in the set $y_1, R^4 y_1, R^8 R^4 y_1, \ldots$, mod the relations that $R^5 y_1 = 0, R^9 R^4 y_1 = 0$, and so on.

The first sawtooth is pictured in Figure 3. It has generators $R^7 y_1, R^9 y_1, R^{11} y_1$, and so on, with $v_0 R^7 y_1 = v_1 R^7 y_1$, etc, mod the relation $v_1 R^7 y_1 = 0$. The second sawtooth has generators $R^{11} R^4 y_1, R^{13} R^4 y_1$, and so on.

**Proof sketch.** The first observation is that if $R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m}$ is an admissible monomial and $a_1$ and $a_2$ are odd, then $R^{a_1-2} R^{a_2-1} \ldots R^{a_m}$ is also an admissible monomial. Therefore, every admissible monomial starting with two odd terms has a canonical lower admissible monomial with a differential that makes it $v_1$-torsion.
Almost all of the admissible monomials $R^{a_1}R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m}$ where $a_1$ is odd and $a_2$ is even, by contrast, support differentials and do not survive the spectral sequence. The only exception is when the admissible monomial $R^{a_1+2}R^{a_2+1} \ldots R^{a_m}$ is already zero, and this occurs only when it ends with one of the sequences $R^5, R^9R^4, R^{17}R^8R^4,$ and so on. In this case, there are two possibilities: either $R^{a_1}R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m}$ also ends with this sequence and it was already the zero monomial, or it is one of the monomials $R^5, R^9R^4, R^{17}R^8R^4,$ and so on, with $a$ odd.

The differentials in the Koszul complex imply $d(R^4y_1) = v_1R^7y_1, d(R^8R^4y_1) = v_1R^{11}R^4y_1,$ and so on. Therefore, in the Bockstein spectral sequence the elements $v_0^kR^4y_1$ support differentials to the hidden extensions $v_0^kR^7y_1 = v_1^{k+1}R^{7+2k}y_1,$ the elements $v_0^kR^8R^4y_1$ support differentials to the hidden extensions $v_1^kR^{11}+2kR^4y_1,$ and so on. These impose the “right-hand edge” of the sawtooth patterns. □

13 Further calculations: $n = 2$

The calculation for $n = 2$ is carried out in a very similar fashion to the calculation for $n = 1$. Again, there are two spectral sequences calculating $\text{Ext}_{E(2)R\text{-mod}}(QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_2)$. The first is the Bockstein spectral sequence

$$\text{Ext}_{E(1)R\text{-mod}}(QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_2) \otimes \mathbb{F}_2[v_2] \Rightarrow \text{Ext}_{E(2)R\text{-mod}}(QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_2),$$

and the second is the spectral sequence

$$\text{Ext}_{E(-1)R\text{-mod}}(QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_2) \otimes \mathbb{F}_2[v_0, v_1, v_2] \Rightarrow \text{Ext}_{E(2)R\text{-mod}}(QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_2)$$

arising from filtering the Koszul complex. The $E_1$-term of the second has a basis of admissible monomials

$$v_0^k v_1^k v_2^k R^{a_1} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1$$
We can again use these differentials to determine hidden extensions and Bockstein differentials. As before, this makes all admissible monomials of the form $R^a$ (except for those which are right multiples of $R^x$) linearizable by the admissible monomials of the form $x$ for $a$ odd, these differentials take the following form:

$$d(R^a(x) = (a + 1)(v_0R^a+1x + v_1R^a+3x + v_2R^a+7x) + R^a(dx)$$

$$R^a(v_2x) = 0$$

$$R^a(v_1x) = v_2R^{a+4}x$$

$$R^a(v_0x) = v_2R^{a+6}x + v_1R^{a+2}x$$

We can again use these differentials to determine hidden extensions and Bockstein differentials on the basis calculated in the previous section. We begin with some hidden extensions.

**Lemma 13.1.** In the $v_2$-Bockstein spectral sequence, when $x$ is a cycle there are hidden extensions

$$v_0R^{a_1}R^{a_2}x = v_2R^{a_1+4}R^{a_2+2}x$$

whenever $R^{a_1}R^{a_2}x$ is admissible and $a_1$ and $a_2$ are odd.

**Proof.** The differential

$$d(R^{a_1-1}R^{a_2}x + R^{a_1}R^{a_2-1}x) = v_0R^{a_1}R^{a_2}x + v_2R^{a_1+4}R^{a_2+2}x,$$

for $x$ a cycle in the filtered Koszul complex, establishes this relation.

We now calculate differentials. The first type are differentials on admissible monomials that start with two odd operations:

$$d(R^{a_1}R^{a_2}R^{a_3}x) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } a_1, a_2, \text{ and } a_3 \text{ are odd} \\ v_2R^{a_1+4}R^{a_2+2}R^{a_3+1}x & \text{if } a_1, a_2 \text{ are odd and } a_3 \text{ is even} \end{cases}$$

As before, this makes all admissible monomials of the form $R^{a_1}R^{a_2}R^{a_3} \ldots R^{a_m}x$, where $a_1$, $a_2$, and $a_3$ are odd, into $v_2$-torsion elements. These are systematically eliminated by the admissible monomials of the form $R^{a_1}R^{a_2}R^{a_3} \ldots R^{a_m}x$, where $a_1$ and $a_2$ are odd but $a_3$ is even, except for those among the following list:

$$R^{a_1}R^{a_2}R^4y_1,$$

$$R^{a_1}R^{a_2}R^8R^4y_1,$$

$$R^{a_1}R^{a_2}R^{16}R^8R^4y_1, \ldots$$

The second type are differentials on classes that are part of the "sawtooth" patterns. For $a$ odd, these differentials take the following form:

$$d(R^a y_1) = 0,$$

$$d(R^a R^4 y_1) = v_2R^{a+4}R^7y_1,$$

$$d(R^a R^8 R^4 y_1) = v_2R^{a+4}R^4R^4y_1,$$

$$d(R^a R^{16} R^8 R^4 y_1) = v_2R^{a+4}R^{12}R^4R^4y_1, \ldots$$

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These differentials in the Bockstein spectral sequence hit \(v_0\)-torsion elements. However, the hidden extension

\[ v_0 R^{a_1} R^{a_2} x = v_2 R^{a_1 + 4} R^{a_2 + 2} x \]

from Lemma 13.1 forces higher differentials:

\[
\begin{align*}
    d(v_0^k R^a y_1) &= 0, \\
    d(v_0^k R^a R^4 y_1) &= v_2^{k+1} R^{a+4k+4} R^{7+2k} y_1, \\
    d(v_0^k R^a R^8 R^4 y_1) &= v_2^{k+1} R^{a+4k+4} R^{11+2k} R^4 y_1, \\
    d(v_0^k R^a R^{16} R^8 R^4 y_1) &= v_2 R^{a+4k+4} R^{19+2k} R^8 R^4 y_1, \ldots
\end{align*}
\]

and so on. The targets span all of the admissible monomials which we previously described as being in the kernel of the differential.

Putting this calculation together, we are led to the following conclusion.

**Proposition 13.2.** The \(\text{Ext}\)-groups

\[ \text{Ext}_{E(2) R \text{-mod}}(QH, BP, \mathbb{F}_2) \]

are a direct sum of copies of four types of terms:

1. a free copy of \(\mathbb{F}_2[v_0, v_1, v_2]\) generated by \(y_1\),
2. a \((v_0, v_1)\)-sawtooth pattern generated by the classes \(R^a y_1\) with \(a\) odd, \(a \geq 7\),
3. \((v_0, v_1, v_2)\)-torsion copies of \(\mathbb{F}_2\) indexed by those admissible monomials \(R^{a_1} R^{a_2} \ldots R^{a_m} y_1\) with \(a_1, a_2, \text{ and } a_3\) odd which do not end in any of the sequences \(R^5 y_1, R^9 R^4 y_1, R^{17} R^8 R^4 y_1\), and so on, and
4. \((v_0, v_2)\) sawtooth patterns

\[ \mathbb{F}_2[v_0, v_2] [R^a R^b x] / (v_0 R^a R^b x = v_2 R^{a+4} R^{b+2} x) \]

as \(R^a R^b x\) range over admissible monomials with \(a\) and \(b\) odd and \(x\) in the set \(y_1, R^4 y_1, R^4 R^4 y_1, \ldots\), mod the relations that \(R^4 y_1 = 0, R^8 R^4 y_1 = 0, \text{ and so on.}\)

The first \((v_0, v_2)\) sawtooth pattern appears in Figure 4.

**Remark 13.3.** The \(v_1\)-multiplication on the \((v_0, v_2)\)-sawtooth patterns is more complicated and we will not describe it here.

### 14 Final calculations in weight 2

The calculations we have been doing can be carried out for larger and larger values of \(n\) and obey systematic patterns, but require more and more bookkeeping with respect to the edge cases. However, we will ultimately be interested in weight 2. Here, we have already isolated everything: we have determined all the permanent cycles and their quotient by the differentials on classes in lower weight.
**Proposition 14.1.** The part of

$$\text{Ext}_{E(2)}^{n} R^{\text{mod}}(QH, BP, F_2)$$

on classes in weight less than or equal to 2 is a sum of three terms:

1. in weight 0, there is a copy of $F_2[v_0, v_1, v_2]$ generated by $y_1$;

2. in weight 1, there is a $(v_0, v_1)$-sawtooth pattern generated by the classes $R^a y_1$ for $a \geq 7$, $a$ odd, with $v_0 R^a y_1 = v_1 R^{a+2} y_1$;

3. in weight 2, there are $(v_0, v_2)$-sawtooth patterns generated by the classes $R^a R^b y_1$ for $b \geq 7$, $a > 2b$, $a$ and $b$ odd, with $v_0 R^a R^b y_1 = v_2 R^{a+4} R^{b+2} y_1$.\(^\text{11}\)

In particular, these all lift to permanent cycles in the Koszul complex for $\text{Ext}_{E(n)}^{n} R^{\text{mod}}(QH, BP, F_2)$.

In particular, the fact that we have permanent cycles implies that all the higher Bockstein spectral sequences degenerate in weights less than or equal to two.

**Corollary 14.2.** For any $n \geq 2$, the Bockstein spectral sequences

$$\text{Ext}_{E(2)}^{n} R^{\text{mod}}(QH, BP, F_2) \otimes F_2[v_3, \ldots, v_n] \Rightarrow \text{Ext}_{E(n)}^{n} R^{\text{mod}}(QH, BP, F_2)$$

degenerate in weights less than or equal to two.

Since filtration is greater than or equal to weight, this gives a complete list of classes in Ext-filtration less than or equal to three except for classes of the form $R^a R^b R^c x$, all of which are in large negative degree.

\(^{11}\)There is one sawtooth pattern for each odd positive value of $a - 2b$. 

---

**Figure 4:** Part of the first $(v_0, v_2)$ sawtooth pattern in Ext for $n = 2$. 

- $R^{24} R^{11} y_1$
- $R^{19} R^8 y_1$
- $R^{15} R^7 y_1$

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References


